Characters

- BEAST GIRL
- BEAST WOMAN
- BEAST MAN
- DEAD HUMAN, *a dark young man*

The beasts are real people, a black family. At times their speech can be slightly unreal or at times their physical movements can suggest a bestiality, but they are real people. Ideally they should all resemble each other. They perhaps could have an artificial pallor or perhaps artificially pale eyes, but it should be subtle.

Floating images should ideally float through space above them.

THE ROOMS

The action takes place in the rooms simultaneously.

BEAST MAN'S ROOM--a great dark chair, hymnals.

BEAST GIRL'S ROOM--mahogany bed; above it a picture of Jesus.

BEAST WOMAN'S ROOM--a great dark dresser, perfume, wine bottles.

ATTIC--an ax hanging on the wall.

HALL--candles.

All the rooms are dim. (Suggested by yellowed wallpaper, etc˙) In reality it is the gloomy house of a minister in a drab section of a midwestern city.

Sound of discordant organ music throughout. Images remain still.

Act

BEAST GIRL' *s room, in shadow. She sits on a bed*. BEAST MAN *comes toward her from the doorway, smiling, saying something she does not comprehend*. BEAST MAN *catches* BEAST GIRL' *s hand, pressing it to his face. Discordant organ music*.

BEAST WOMAN *wanders aimlessly through the downstairs hall and slowly up to her room. She then sits before the dresser, pulling from the drawer undefined objects, moving them from side to side of the dresser. Suddenly she rouses herself, staring at the room, then falling onto the dresser, burying her head*.

Floating dead
the image of the dead human
Dead blue crow dead toad

BEAST WOMAN *comes from her room, stares up at the floating images from her doorway, floating images bright. Image of* BEAST GIRL *and* BEAST MAN *remain*.

BEAST WOMAN

The sky above this house is painted a flat shallow blue. All might be warm and sunlit.

BEAST MAN

(*staring into his daughter's face*)

My daughter sits in shadow. I come toward her smiling, saying something she does not comprehend. Through the house floats the image of the boy she loved and the dead blue crow and the dead toad that hops on her bedpost.

BEAST WOMAN

I keep the ax. I keep the ax to maintain her innocence. She lay down in that field beyond the house with him. I begged her at the wedding to maintain her innocence. I said each evening he will come to you, his face in twilight.

BEAST GIRL

My father preached our wedding service and a black sun floated over the altar. A crow flew through an open window while my mother played the organ and the black sun floated.

(*Her father still standing before her*.)

He had to stop singing, he had to stop singing, the room was silent. He tried to kiss me. It was morning when I awakened, a red sunrise morning, the first day of my marriage. At last I knew who I was ... no shadow of myself, I was revealed ... to myself ... Now I rock the dead baby. I remember when we walked in the field.

BEAST MAN *stares at* BEAST GIRL. BEAST WOMAN *still stares at the floating images. A bright light comes into* BEAST MAN' *s room. A light comes up in the attic, revealing the* DEAD HUMAN.

DEAD HUMAN

She kept the ax. She kept the ax to maintain her innocence. The beasts came to the clearing. They remember when we were not here. Now they watch from the trees, beckoning. She fled to the hallway. I tried to kiss her hand.

BEAST GIRL

I have killed as she killed. He followed me into the hall and tried to kiss my hand.

DEAD HUMAN

It was raining. Beast noises were in the house.

BEAST GIRL

I looked down at him sleeping naked, covers thrown from him. I covered him with the sheet, but before I did I looked at him naked. Suddenly he awakened, raising himself smiling, holding out his hand to mine. How cold his fingers were!

DEAD HUMAN

You lay down in that field with me. I wanted you to go with me but you couldn't. Your hair grew as you looked into their ravaged faces. The jackals, the toad, and the mice are glad.

BEAST GIRL

I slipped my hand from his. He fell back into a strong deep sleep naked again, having tossed the covers from himself.

DEAD HUMAN

Your hair grown, eyes turned beast yellow, the toad knew, the toad has always known. The first night of our marriage you fled from our bed. I found you, face ravaged, sitting in your father's room, staring at the candles. Afterwards they made you kill my baby with quinine and whiskey.

BEAST WOMAN *wanders through the hall, picks up an ax from the hall, slowly carries it to the attic, hangs it high and speaks. She does all this without seeing or acknowledging the* DEAD HUMAN.

BEAST WOMAN

The jackals are glad.

BEAST GIRL

The toad and the jackals knew.

DEAD HUMAN

They are glad.

BEAST MAN *wanders through his house and to his room and stares from a window*.

Beast voices. He was the beast that sent you from me. Your father said things I did not comprehend and the sky turned black.

BEAST GIRL

The first boy I loved trapped in our forest weeping. Could I have been human?

BEAST MAN

I had expected to find love in our married life ... I sensed a loss of control. Footsteps, I could hear her humming.

BEAST GIRL

And that dawn.

BEAST MAN

That dawn your life began.

DEAD HUMAN

The beasts that came to the window each night knew.

Sound of footsteps, floating images. BEAST GIRL *runs to the hall, staring at the* DEAD HUMAN *who has come down into the hallway and stands before her. They remain staring at each other*. BEAST MAN *remains*

at the window. BEAST WOMAN *is at her vanity, head fallen on the table asleep. She awakens, cries out. Organ music*.

BEAST WOMAN

Each evening my husband kneels at my bedside, his face in twilight. I've begged him to wipe the blood from my bed, pleaded with him to lift me from those sheets of blood where I cut the throat of a pigeon poult to keep myself untouched. He is spending all his days grieving.

BEAST GIRL *and the* DEAD HUMAN *stand before each other*.

My daughter was born in September. I went into labor at my dead sister's funeral. Twenty hours later she was born. It was a girl.

BEAST MAN

(*at the window*)

The collar of my suit hung about my neck. The collar. She had snatched my collar. I walked to my table, sat down and opened the Bible. I had 'raped my wife.

BEAST WOMAN

I came close to death in that birth. When I tried to hold the baby I became hysterical and broke into weeping.

BEAST GIRL *goes to her room*. DEAD HUMAN *follows her. He tries to rape her. They struggle. She falls back on the bed. He lifts his face from her. Her body jerks queerly. The room is silent. He tries to rouse her, caressing her. She looks up at him as he disappears into a darkened hall*.

BEAST GIRL

My father comes to the door of my room, smiles, stopping in the hallway. He rests his head against the wall. My mother sits staring at a blank wall, brushing her beast hair. Dust fills the room. Our supper bones are on the floor, noises in the forest. Rain blew the trees. He stared at the floor in a peculiar manner, a half smile on his lips. Unbelievable, he said. He began to pray. He went on praying in the soft voice those lips mysterious. I looked at them in the dim living room, in the yellowed church and in their separate rooms. My father took on the appearance of an animal in his black preacher's suit.

BEAST WOMAN *is humming harshly a lullaby*. BEAST GIRL *lies back, appears to sleep*. BEAST WOMAN *walks up and down the stairs*. BEAST GIRL *rises and stares down the hallway at the stairs. The* DEAD HUMAN *enters from the darkness. She speaks to him*.

A toad jumps about. My mother holds out her arms to me. I run to her, dropping my bridal bouquet. When I come close to her I realize she is sitting on the bed in our room, the curtains drawn, the bed sheets crumpled. On the wall hangs the doleful picture of the Virgin and Child. She is kneeling by the window, her hair awry, her pale eyes closed. She does not look at me but stares fixedly toward the ceiling, praying.

BEAST MAN *calls her. She descends the stairway slowly*. BEAST WOMAN *walking in the hallway bursts into a sob*.

BEAST WOMAN

Our ravaged beast faces ... the jackals, the toad, and the mice are glad. The toad remembers when we were

southern Negroes who came to the city.

BEAST MAN *beckons*.

BEAST GIRL

What is it?

BEAST MAN

It was a woman she wanted to be. I said what has beguiled you? I drew her upon the sofa. Was it death, she said. Death? You spoke of death at our wedding. I did not answer. Was I speaking of death or was it God? I smiled at her.

BEAST GIRL

He will stop singing.

(*Floating black sun*.)

I sit on the bed. He tries to take me. I want him to. Yet we struggle on the bed. The room is silent and animals wander through our house. Now in the attic the boy I loved rocks our dead baby in his arms, sliding in lifeless steps. I cry out, calling him, but he does not answer. Outside the sun withdraws.

BEAST WOMAN

How sad it makes me that you love him. I must go and pray.

BEAST MAN

Outside wolves and bears. I sit in my room calling someone. A golden light comes into the room, a mysterious peace.

In the attic the DEAD HUMAN *rocks the dead baby*, BEAST WOMAN *hums harshly. The* DEAD HUMAN *hums his lullaby*.

He must stop singing.

BEAST GIRL

My father built a crib.

(*Staring at her father*.)

How he loved me, saw me in the crib, circled by the golden aureole. My mother. Black shadows were etched under those pale eyes, for she hardly slept at night and suffered endless wakeful fits. She was constantly tired, giving the feeling of someone in continual child labor. Above the bed hung a doleful picture of the Virgin and Child. Beneath the picture was a print of a downcast Christ. Now the moon is out. A bird perches on my bedpost, a great toad runs through the house. I killed his baby with quinine and whiskey. Now he never leaves the attic.

DEAD HUMAN *slides from side to side rocking the dead baby*. BEAST GIRL *calling to him*.

You must stop singing the lullaby.

(DEAD HUMAN *stops. She calls again*.)

You must stop singing.

(*He listens, then goes on. He goes on rocking the baby, humming. Appearance of the floating dead*.)

Darkness

BEAST WOMAN

(*from her room*)

Now I wander through the rooms, gaze at the dead. The flat sunlight bright. The jackals and I are glad.

(*She goes to the door, locks it, sitting before the dresser, drinks wine and bursts into loud crying. The lights in all the rooms are dim and golden. Organ music*.)

BEAST GIRL

(*before* BEAST MAN' *s doorway*)

I dream, dead man. Dead blue crow, dead toad. My mother comes from her room, stands and stares at the dead. Beasts stare into the windows. Inside, my father's room is bright, full of the image of the dead boy I loved. Dead blue crow and a dead toad all bright.

BEAST MAN *smiles, leaves the room. Sound of footsteps*. BEAST GIRL *runs to the hall. The* DEAD HUMAN *appears from the hall. They stand before each other and stare*. BEAST WOMAN *awakens as from a bizarre dream, cries out*. DEAD HUMAN *and* BEAST GIRL *stand before each other*.

DEAD HUMAN

Your hair grown, eyes turned beast yellow, the toad knew the first night of our marriage you fled from our bed. I took you on our bed. We struggled. I was stronger. When I lifted my face from you the room was silent. You said I had raped you like your father had raped your mother the night you were conceived. You fled from our bed.

Darkness

Organ music. BEAST GIRL *enters the hall outside* BEAST MAN' *s room. A yellow velvet cover drapes his shoulder. She remains outside. He beckons her. All is dark except* BEAST MAN' *s room. Candles burn. He pulls the velvet cover about his shoulder. She hangs outside the room. He beckons. She enters, sits on a pile of dark green books*. BEAST WOMAN *starts up the stairway to the attic*.

BEAST GIRL

(*staring at him*)

My father comes toward me, saying something I do not comprehend. His face exudes a yellow light. The sky turns black. He catches my hand. He begins to sing, no particular melody yet the tone is unwavering and free. No words are distinct. Silence. He goes to the window, looks out, continues to sing. He sings a beast song. Our hair grown, our eyes turned yellow. We are trapped in this beast house singing beast songs.

BEAST MAN *starts to move as if to strike* BEAST GIRL *in the face. His arm swings up, he drops his arm. He looks as if he is going to fall down, his big body swaying, then puts his hand to his eyes as if the lights*

suddenly blind him. He darts to the left side and then to the right still looking as though he might fall to the floor.

Darkness

Flat moon bright. Sky very black, BEAST WOMAN *hums harshly. Her voice trails off*.

BEAST GIRL' *s room. A flat sunlight appears through her window. She is asleep*.

BEAST MAN' *s room. He is sitting in his room, calling someone unseen. A golden light comes into the room, seeming to fire him. He lifts himself from the chair, seizes his head*.

Darkness

BEAST WOMAN *falls across a tumbled bed, breathing heavily*. BEAST MAN *comes to the door. She sits up*.

DEAD HUMAN

Now in the attic I weep over our dead baby. I am trapped in this beast house.

BEAST MAN, *listening, comes to the hall. He darts to the left and to the right, then suddenly sits on the stairs*.

BEAST GIRL' *s room. She awakens*. BEAST WOMAN *comes in, carrying the ax, going straight to* BEAST GIRL, *falling upon her, clasping her neck*.

BEAST WOMAN

How sad it makes me that you love this boy.

Darkness

BEAST MAN' *s room*. BEAST GIRL *is staring at the candles in her father's room, sitting in his chair*.

BEAST GIRL

All might be warm and sunlit. My father comes toward me, saying something I do not comprehend and the sky turns black. Why does he smile when he leaves my room?

Darkness

Floating dead images. BEAST WOMAN *sits in* BEAST GIRL' *s room, staring from the window*. BEAST MAN *suddenly stands on the stairs and starts to sing, no particular melody, and continues to sing looking up the stairs*.

BEAST MAN

He has to stop singing. It was morning when I awakened the first day of my daughter's marriage. At last I knew who I was ... no shadow of myself ... I was revealed to myself.

BEAST WOMAN *goes on staring from the window*. BEAST MAN *goes on singing. A great light comes onto* BEAST GIRL. *She is wearing a satin wedding gown, sitting in her father's room staring at the candles*. BEAST MAN *looks up the stairs*.

I am more than your father. I am the accomplice to your fate. I believe in the connection too of dreams of dark winter nights. I believe in the joining of nightmares and visions.

Darkness

DEAD HUMAN *enters the house, stands at* BEAST GIRL' *s door. He goes to the bed, lies down*. BEAST GIRL *enters, wearing wedding gown, face ravaged, wedding gown torn, buttons fall from bodice. She takes a pillow, bends down, never taking her eyes from him, smothers him with all her strength. He moves fiercely as though he will spring up but instead totters backward, eyes open, tongue out. He holds out his hand, trying to reach her*. BEAST WOMAN *watches from her place at the window*.

BEAST WOMAN

My daughter takes a pillow, never taking her eyes from him, smothers him with all her strength. He moves fiercely

as though he will spring up but instead totters backward. He holds out his hand, trying to reach her.

Floating dead images bright. A strange flat sunlight comes out. BEAST WOMAN *watches*. BEAST MAN *stands on the steps, staring toward his daughter's room*. BEAST GIRL *flees to the hallway through it and into the attic, pulls down the ax. He has followed her into the hall. They meet. She swings the ax upon him. He tries to kiss her then falls dead in his blood. A blue crow behind her, she turns and instantly kills it with the ex. A giant toad hops to the room, croaking. She sees it and wildly axes it to pieces. Beast noises. She swings the ax, wildly screaming. Noises louder. She drops the ax, falls down weeping*.

Silence

BEAST MAN AND BEAST WOMAN

Our daughter fled to the hallway and into the attic. She pulled down the ax. She swung the ax upon him. He tried to kiss her but fell dead in his blood. Now the sky above our house is blue, three robins with red chests appear on the horizon. All is warm and sunlit.

Silence. Strange bright sunlight, then darkness.